

Stow Acres Concept Planning

Questions and Answers from 2/10/21 Public Forum

Prepared by the Stow Acres Planning Team – 3/2/2021



In February 2020, Stow Planning and Conservation staff, Stow Conservation Trust, a local developer, a representative of Stow Acres, and a land planner from Flinker & Dodson jointly announced at a Public Forum that they were working together on a “concept plan” for the 300+ acre Stow Acres property that would preserve approximately 90% of the property for conservation and recreation uses, including golf, and develop the remaining 10% of the land for housing. Following the Forum, residents were invited to submit questions and answers about the effort. The questions – and answers to them – can be found below, along with the concept plan. The Planning Team does not yet have answers to all of the questions, but is considering them as the plans evolve. As more information becomes available, it will be posted on the Town’s website at: <https://www.stow-ma.gov/planning-board/pages/stow-acres-planning-process>. Additional questions and comments can be directed to StowAcresPlan@stow-ma.gov.

Questions about Golf Aspects

Why is so much golf being retained at the site if golf is waning in demand?

The national trend for golf over the past 10-20 years has been one of decline. Stow Acres is proposing to reduce the amount of golf by 25% (9 holes) in the short term, and over time, the remaining 9 holes on the North Course will be retired as part of Phase 2 of this project. One of the goals of the cooperative planning effort is to preserve as much ongoing golf at Stow Acres for as long as it makes economic sense to do so. That is because golf as an activity has been an important element of Stow's community identity, and the 100+ year history of golf at Stow Acres has comprised a significant portion of that history.

Who will own the golf courses (South and North)? Would a lease to Stow Acres be considered?

It is planned for the owners of Stow Acres to continue to own and operate the South Course and for the Town of Stow to purchase much of the land on the North Course subject to a lease back to Stow Acres for 9 golf holes for a pre-determined period of time.

What if golf use ceases on the South Course or North Course? What will happen to the land?

The Town will decide what to do with the land on the North Course should golf operations cease, but the plan would be to retain it for conservation and recreation purposes. The land on the South Side will be restricted to remain as a golf course by the terms of a Conservation Restriction, but with other low-impact conservation and recreation uses also allowed (see the discussion of the Conservation Restriction below).

What is the rationale for a new nine-hole course?

There is no new nine-hole course. The 9 holes on the North side are already part of the Stow Acres North Course.

Will there be a municipal golf course?

A municipal golf course is not planned at this time – Stow currently has 4 golf courses within its borders now. Stow Acres has done a fine job providing golf at this site for a century.

Would it be possible to eliminate the nine-hole golf course and create more natural habitat there instead?

In the short term, Stow Acres would continue to operate nine holes on the North Course for a pre-determined lease period. In the future, it is expected that this land would be used for a combination of conservation and recreation.

What will be the land management practices on the golf courses? Can more sustainable methods be used? Elimination of pesticides and reduction of fertilizers?

Stow Acres seeks to use the best land management practices that it can and has an Integrated Pest Management Plan for the golf courses. Most pesticides and fertilizers over the past 10-20 years are much more organic than previously used and are used in the smallest quantity feasible due to their cost.

Questions about Conservation and Recreation Aspects

What are the terms of the Conservation Restriction on the South Course? What uses would be allowed?

The specific terms of the Conservation Restriction are subject to negotiation between the owners of Stow Acres and the Town Conservation Commission/Stow Conservation Trust. Broadly, the Conservation Restriction is anticipated to provide for continuing golf uses, and a variety of other low-impact uses like cross-country skiing, agriculture, etc. Similar to the terms of the Carver Hill Conservation Restriction, some structures relating to allowed uses would likely be permitted within the “core” clubhouse area of the golf course. No new residential development would be permitted. Again, similar to Carver Hill, the Town and the Trust intend to negotiate a recreational trail easement on the South Course as part of the Conservation Restriction.

What does the Conservation Restriction on the South Course cost? Who will pay for it?

The price of the Conservation Restriction is subject to further negotiation, with the benefit of independent appraisal consultation. Appraisal work is soon to be initiated. It is anticipated that the primary source of the funds for this conservation component at Stow Acres will be Stow Community Preservation Act funds to be appropriated at Annual Town Meeting in May 2021.

Who will hold and enforce the Conservation Restriction?

The Conservation Restriction would likely be co-held by the Town through its Conservation Commission and Stow Conservation Trust, or just by the Conservation Commission. There are already about 40 similar restrictions on public and private land in Stow, protecting nearly 1000 acres of land. The earliest restrictions were recorded in the 1970s and are still in place today. Those lands are generally monitored for compliance with the Conservation Restriction at least once annually, with regular dialogue between the conservation restriction holder(s) and the landowner. The Town and the Trust co-hold conservation restrictions on Carver Hill Orchard and Small Farm, so this is a familiar arrangement and one that has stood the test of time.

Would Cross Country Skiing be allowed? Sledding?

We anticipate that cross-country skiing could occur within the trail easement area. Broader ski access and sledding use would need to be discussed with the owners.

Can trails be designed to be accessible to all (wheelchairs, strollers, etc.)?

It is anticipated that at least a portion of the new trails at Stow Acres would be accessible to all, including those with mobility challenges. Some are likely to be paved, and some unpaved. An overall trails plan will need to be developed as the project moves forward.

What is the current need for ballfields? Does it take into consideration the newer fields at Stow Community Park?

The Town currently has several ballfields, including those at Stow Community Park. The existing fields are in near constant use and, as a result, the Recreation Department does not have the ability to rest fields during their busy season. The Stow Open Space and Recreation Plan, approved in 2016, notes that a high priority goal for the town is to identify and acquire suitable sites to meet the Town's active recreation needs, with a preference for a larger site which can support multiple activities, and is relatively flat and accessible for roads and utilities. The proposed Stow Acres site would meet this need.

What about a larger play structure/playground area? What about pickleball? What about a pool or dog park?

Approximately 12 acres are proposed to be set aside in the short term for the Recreation Department to install athletic fields and other recreation facilities. The exact "program" for what would be built there is yet to be determined. The Stow Recreation Department will be doing a full assessment of the site to determine the best site design to meet community needs. The Town would also look for public input on other recreational facilities the community would potentially like to see in Stow. While a pool is possible, a recent townwide survey found little support for a municipal swimming pool compared with other recreational uses.

Are there treatments required for the playing fields that could impact nearby wetlands?

Any playing fields would be some distance away from wetlands. If fields are proposed within the 100' buffer zone to wetlands or within 200' of streams, a permit from the Conservation Commission would be required and any conditions required by the Conservation Commission would need to be met.

Can playing fields be moved to the other side of the development to reduce impacts on Fairway Drive?

The suitability analysis of the site identified the proposed development area as the most appropriate location for new development. There would not be room for the fields on the other side of the development without pushing the development into stream/pond areas at the center of the site and raising significant complications for the nine holes of golf on the North Course.

What's to prevent the landowners from coming back in 5-10 years to sell more of what they are keeping in golf use?

All land retained by Stow Acres will be subject to permanent restrictions that prevent future development. The land could be sold to a new owner, but would need to be kept in golf or other open space use.

Where does Stow stand on rail trails generally?

The Planning Board, Conservation Commission, and Complete Streets Committees are supportive of rail trails generally, and have been actively working to advance Stow's connectivity with regional rail trails in Hudson and Acton. Funds were appropriated at 2020

Annual Town Meeting for survey and concept design work on Track Road to enhance trail use of that corridor and the town is continuing to work with regional groups, legislators and others to explore ways to fill the “Stow gap” in the Assabet River Rail Trail.

Questions about Housing Aspects

How will proposed housing be permitted? A subdivision, Planned Conservation Development, or Comprehensive Permit through Chapter 40B?

Given the open space, recreation and traditional neighborhood design ideas being pursued, a Comprehensive Permit through Chapter 40B is the best choice for maximum design flexibility. There may be one permit for for-sale housing and a second permit for rental housing.

Are there any zoning changes needed for the project?

Utilizing the Comprehensive Permit process, no requests for zoning changes are anticipated.

How many dwellings are being proposed? Or what is the range being considered?

The value of the golf course land is based upon the potential buildout. As presented at the Forum, the two parcels could currently be subdivided into approximately 140 – 150 market rate single family houses. While this does not equate to the number that will be proposed, it does provide a baseline to develop a range of proposed dwellings and evaluate the mix of rental vs for sale dwellings. The owner and developer will be incorporating the comments and feedback into the planning effort and will be working to find the proper balance of homes that can meet the Town’s goal of providing for a broad range of incomes, providing for housing at the neighborhood scale, and ensuring financial feasibility.

What is the mix of rentals and ownership dwellings?

This is to be determined, but likely in the range of 30% rental.

What size homes will the housing mix include?

One of the primary goals of the housing component is housing unit diversity. “Smaller” homes will be incorporated. “Smaller” for the purposes of for-sale housing would be in the range of 1,800 square feet. We are also evaluating inclusion of rental cottages, which would be approximately 1,200 square feet. Since the year 2000, the median size of a single family home constructed in Stow is 3,291 square feet.

Will multi-family buildings be proposed?

This has not yet been determined.

If multi-family buildings are proposed, would they be one 2-3 story building or multiple large buildings? How many stories?

We do not anticipate proposing multiple large rental buildings. We are evaluating a multi-family building targeted toward elderly residents. Early discussions have centered on finding an

architectural style and site plan placement that could complement the existing historic Randall House and otherwise better fit within the context of the larger neighborhood.

What do you expect the price range of the dwellings to be?

Affordable three-bedroom homes in Stow, which would be eligible for inclusion on the Town's subsidized housing inventory, would be sold for approximately \$275,000, pending interest rates, tax levels and any association fees for water and sewer.

What percent of the housing created would be designated as affordable?

Chapter 40B requires that 25% of homes be designated as affordable in terms of the price/rent. Rental houses or apartments proposed as part of a Comprehensive Permit under Chapter 40B, may all count towards the Town goal of having 10% of all dwellings in Stow designated as affordable on the state's Subsidized Housing Inventory. Ownership homes only count toward the 10% if they are restricted to sell at a cost designated as affordable.

Will there be 55+ housing?

We are looking at incorporating some rentals for elderly (likely 62 +). Other rentals (cottages) would be one level living which would accommodate older residents. A portion of the for-sale housing would also feature 1st floor master bedrooms to be attractive for persons 55 +.

Was that a preliminary road layout or a specific one?

Preliminary – but we consider it a very good start as it is positioned in a way to not interfere with other site amenities and open space areas.

The plans could negatively affect property values of the adjacent lots along Gleasondale Road and Cross Street? What consideration is being given to this? Can you leave open space between the adjacent properties and any new housing?

The abutting homes on Gleasondale Road and Cross Street would be the closest Stow residences to the proposed development area. Several approaches to mitigate any impacts could be considered, including a buffer of open space between the development and existing homes, a more specific landscaping and/or screening plan, as well as improved access to any proposed trail networks and site amenities. As the development program advances, further details will allow the project team and affected abutters to share ideas.

Could all dwellings accommodate accessibility (any one of us could become disabled at any time)?

As referenced above we believe there will be a range of options available for accessibility. We will continue to work with the Town on its specific housing goals to determine what types of amenities would allow for successful aging in place.

Will the Stow Municipal Affordable Housing Trust (SMAHT) be involved in the creation or management of the affordable dwellings?

We consider SMAHT's experience and input invaluable at the planning stage. Members of the Planning Team met with SMAHT early on to ensure that the team accurately understood the Town's housing goals and to solicit their input in the plans.

Could solar or heat pumps be used?

The project will incorporate newer green technology and building standards. The specific details will be decided as we get further into the process. The Planning Team is committed to exploring creative and financially feasible ways to incorporate energy efficiency and related technologies.

Could there be a site for a Habitat for Humanity project?

It is not anticipated at this time as they work on their creation of affordable housing in a different format.

Would the vision for the property be similar to Pine Hills in Plymouth with mixed use development that includes restaurants, cafes or markets? Could there be fewer golf holes and more revenue generation?

It is unlikely that a substantial commercial or other revenue-generating component would be feasible at this site from a market-based perspective and commercial/office development is not allowed by the zoning for the site. Further, the Town has been working to improve commercial activity within its established business districts, such as Lower Village.

What percentage of affordable housing does Stow currently have as it relates to the state Subsidized Housing Inventory? What's the maximum desired goal for this? Is it the same for every town? The Commonwealth of Massachusetts Chapter 40B statute mandates Towns to provide 10% of their total dwellings at prices affordable to families making at or below 80% of the Area Median Income. The 10% affordable housing goal is for every community in Massachusetts, regardless of size. Stow is currently at approximately 7.4%

What percent of Stow residents are currently over 65? According to census estimates, 12% of residents are currently over the age of 65. It is anticipated that by 2030, more than 30% of the Town's population will be over 65.

What could happen on the site if the proposed project falls through? How many dwellings could be built?

Based on previous analyses, the buildout under conventional subdivision regulations would create 140 – 150 single family houses on standard sized 1.5 acre lots. The potential for development under Chapter 40B is much more difficult to define. However, based upon examples from previous projects it is likely that the property could sustain 300 – 500 (or more) houses and/or apartments due to its large size. Examples of this can be seen in other communities in the region. Under such a scenario, the property would likely be developed in phases, with the potential for a number of separate developments being constructed by one or more developers.

Questions about Costs, Taxes and Town Services

How will a development of this scale impact Stow's Police and Fire Departments? Will another ambulance be needed?

The Project Team will be working with the public safety departments to gauge their current staffing and equipment levels and determine whether the uses proposed have the potential to change their forecasted needs. We know that when other large projects were constructed, such as the Regency at Stow Active Adult Neighborhood development on Boxboro Road, there was a noticeable increase in the number of calls to the new neighborhood. This is an example of the type of impact that needs to be examined. The public safety impacts of the proposed development will be far less, however, than full development of the Stow Acres site as described above.

How will this project impact the number of students in the district?

As the developer begins to narrow down the mix of housing types in accordance with the Town's housing goals, the Project Team will be gathering information regarding the relationship between proposed housing types, such as size and number of bedrooms, and anticipated demographics that may purchase a particular housing product. This type of information will allow the Town to estimate the potential impact of various development scenarios on schools and other Town services.

What are the traffic implications for the proposed developments?

As the development program is further defined, the team will have the opportunity to analyze the difference between the decreased golf traffic, with an increase in residential traffic. The project team has met with public safety officials to begin to identify where improvements to the road network could be made, how to manage the potential for increased pedestrian traffic between the north and south courses, as well as what medium and long term traffic upgrades need to be advanced as the Town grows as a result of this project and others on the drawing board.

The land on the North Course regularly floods and requires water management. Would development cause water to be directed to the lower parts of adjacent properties?

The Town's Zoning Bylaw prohibits any off-site increases in water volume. Even under a Comprehensive Permit, where certain Zoning Bylaws can be waived, the expectation will be a design that manages and recharges stormwater on-site so as not to adversely affect adjacent properties. Any work near wetlands or in floodplains would need to be permitted by the Conservation Commission.

Will this project result in the need to supply public water? Do we have an assessment of any heavy metals that might exist in wells deep enough to support a development?

Prior to approval of a drinking water supply well to serve the site, the Department of Environmental Protection requires a series of water quality tests to determine the extent of any required treatment systems, as well as a pump test, which monitors any nearby wells and/or water resources to identify any potential impact on the aquifer. There has been no discussion

of creating a community water supply for other portions of Stow. The current development envelope provides enough space to supply drinking water and treat wastewater on-site. These are expected to be private systems.

How will this project impact property values in Stow and specifically, on abutting properties?

Generally, the construction of new housing raises area property values, even when incorporating an affordable component.

For what part of this project is the town requesting funding? How much funding will be requested from residents?

The Town is seeking funds for the Phase 1 purchase of a Conservation Restriction on the South Course, and the Phase 2 purchase of a portion of the North Course for conservation and recreation purposes. The size and scope of the housing component, together with the results of the anticipated appraisal will clarify the cost of the town's Phase 1 and Phase 2 purchases.

What is the expected impact on residential property tax rates in Stow? Will taxes be increased to cover this project? Can this project generate tax revenue that will help with the current tax burden?

At this time, it is not anticipated that taxes will be increased to cover the cost of the acquisition of the property. We expect to seek Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds for the Phase 1 purchase of a Conservation Restriction on the South Course. Phase 2 acquisition costs are expected to be covered by CPA funds, state and federal grants and fundraising. Overall, the development of additional residential homes will increase the tax base, spreading the tax burden over more properties. At the same time, there may also be an increase in services. As noted above, these impacts cannot yet be quantified.

Will increases in tax revenue affect abutters only or the whole town?

Revenue generated will benefit the entire town as new growth and be factored into future tax rate setting.

Has Stow Acres benefitted from reduced property taxes for some years due to the nature of the land use? Would these lost taxes be recouped by the Town of Stow upon a sale or development of the property for a new use?

The North and South courses are currently enrolled in Chapter 61B, which allows a reduction in taxes in exchange for committing to keep the land in open space and recreation for a period of time. Rollback taxes may be due for any portions of the land which are converted to development. A sale of the land without conversion would likely not trigger rollback taxes.

Questions about Process

Who makes the decision?

There are multiple levels of decision-making involved with this project:

- The decision about whether or not to proceed with the overall concept plan and sale of land to the Town lies with the landowner, who is a voluntary participant in this effort.

- The decision about the number and type of dwellings will be made by the developer in consultation with the Planning Team.
- The decision about whether or not to proceed with funding the Phase 1 and Phase 2 land purchases from Community Preservation Funds will be made at Town Meeting, assuming a positive recommendation of the Community Preservation Committee.
- Any approval of the proposed development will be made by relevant permitting boards including Zoning Board of Appeals, Planning Board, Conservation Commission and Board of Health.
- Finally, the decisions about specific trail locations and use of the town Conservation and Recreation Lands will be made by the Conservation Commission/SCT and Recreation Commission respectively, in consultation with the Planning Team.

If this doesn't pass at Town Meeting, what happens to the Master Plan?

The landowners are free to sell the property to others for development or other uses at any time. We assume that this would occur if Town Meeting turns down the request for funds for purchase of the land or conservation restrictions.

Can you give an update on the Athens Lane project?

The Athens Lane project off Hudson Road is another large project that is currently in the planning stages. At present the Planning Department is working on revisions to the Stow Zoning Bylaw that will shape this project. These are expected to be presented to Town Meeting in May.

How can I help?

Please discuss this project with your Stow area neighbors and friends and encourage them to learn more. You can follow updates on this project via the Town's website.

Thank you,

Stow Acres Planning Team

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**Conservation, Recreation
and Village Development:**

North Course

- 60 Acres Golf (9 holes)
- 12 Acres Ballfields
- 73 Acres Conservation
- 32 Acres Village

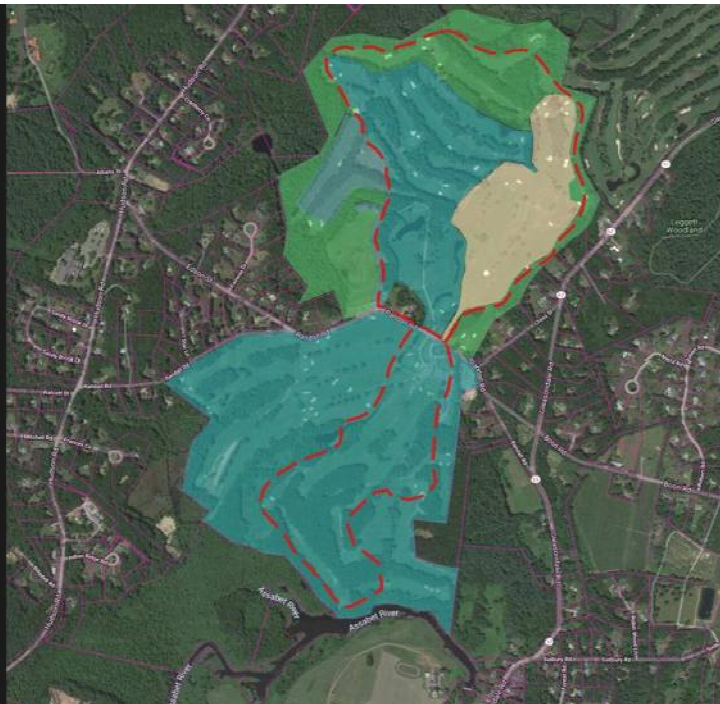
South Course

- 151 Acres Golf
- (18 holes, permanently conserved)

Total Site: 328 Acres

Village Site: 32 Acres

Conservation/Recreation: 296 Acres



North and South Courses

**Conservation, Recreation
and Village Development:**

- 60 Acres 9-hole golf course
 - 12 Acres Recreation Fields
 - 73 Acres Conservation
 - 32 Acres Village (18%)
-
- 177 Acres Total Site Area



North Course Detail